

## **The Grit of African American Male Pre-service Teachers**

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**Abstract.** While the population of America's public schools is becoming more diverse, the percentage of minority teachers is steadily decreasing. While over 44% of all students in America are minority, only 12-14% of teachers are minorities and less than 2% are African American males. The challenge for colleges of education is to recruit more African American male teachers. Therefore, this study was undertaken to explore the concept of grit and its impact on African American males entering the teaching profession.

**Keywords:** Grit, African American Males, Teachers, Minority Teachers, Recruiting, Resilience.

### **INTRODUCTION**

While the population of American public schools is becoming more diverse, the percentage of minority teachers is steadily decreasing (West, 1993; NCES, 2006; Igersoll & May, 2011). With over 44% of all students in America being minority, only 12-14% of teachers are minorities (Howard, 2001; NCES, 2006). While approximately 82% of the 3.8 million teachers in the United States are white, only 7% are African American and 8% Hispanic (Feistritz, 2011; Goldring, Gray,

and Bitterman, 2013). Of these teachers, less than 2% are African American males (Lewis, 2006). These figures must change if educators expect to reduce minority achievement gaps and dropout rates. David Saba, President of the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence in Washington, D.C. has called for the diversification of the profession (Saba, 2005). Greg Johnson, a policy analyst for the National Education Association (NEA), suggests increasing the number of diverse teachers is necessary because of the role model factor (Matheson, 2009). Specifically, African American male role models are important for African American students; but, essentially for African American male students mentoring process and in most cases to represent the father figure. A major challenge for colleges of education is to recruit and retain more African American males into the teaching profession. Among the reasons African American males either chose not to enter or leave the teaching profession is the inability to persevere when faced with adversity (Lewis, 2006). Therefore, this study was undertaken to explore the concept of grit and its impact on African American males entering the teaching profession and to ascertain if this concept can be taught.

## **THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This examination used, as its guiding framework, two theoretical principles: resilience and grit. A brief examination of these two constructs follow.

### **Resilience**

Resilience is broadly defined as the ability to overcome adversity. According to Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000), resilience is the “dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity. Thus, Luthar *et al.* (2000) claims that two conditions must exist when conceptualizing resilience: (a) exposure to threat or adversity and (b) achievement of a positive adaptation. The scientific study of resilience has occurred in three distinct stages, the first of which included a pioneering study by Michael Rutter and Associates on the resilience of children living on the Isle of Wight, a large island in England (Rutter, Tizard, Yule, Graham, & Whitmore, 1976). Over a ten-year period, Rutter studied children whose parents had been diagnosed with a mental illness. Other forms of adversity experienced by the children in the study included discord within the family, low socioeconomic status, and intervention in the lives of the children by a government agency. Rutter *et al.* (1976) found that despite the adverse circumstances many of the children did not display maladaptive

behaviors. Factors present in children labeled resilient included a positive personality, a supportive family, and support from a community entity, such as a school or church group. His study revealed that fostering a sense of achievement and motivation, enhancing personal growth, and increasing social contact with peers within the school environment promoted resilience in the children. Norman Garmezy, who also studied the resiliency of children with mentally ill parents, conducted a similar study that involved the resiliency of children living in urban ghettos. Garmezy (1991) found similar positive adaptations in the resilient participants of his study, including positive dispositional attributes of the child, family cohesion, and supportive members of the community. Also, during this period, Emmy Werner began a revolutionary resilience study on a group of individuals from birth to adulthood. Werner studied the lives of approximately 700 individuals living in Hawaii exposed to poverty as children. Werner (2004) found that about one-third of the individuals developed into productive members of society as adults. By age 40, this group of participants had stable marriages and families, obtained adequate education or vocational skills, and were active in church activities (Werner, 2004). According to the results of the study, their resilience was attributed to self-competence, self-regulation, determination, and effective problem-solving skills (Werner, 2004).

The second stage of resilience research is based on the ecological systems model theorized by Russian-American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner. His research contends that development reflects the influence of several environmental systems. Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecological systems theory identifies five environmental systems:

Microsystem – refers to the groups that most directly affect the development of the subject,

- 1) Mesosystem – refers to relations between microsystems,
- 2) Exosystem – refers to links between a social setting in which the subject does not have an active role
- 3) Macrosystem – refers to the culture in which the subject lives, and
- 4) Chronosystem – refers to environmental events and transitions over the course of life of the subject (Bronfenbrenner, 1999).

Each system contains roles and norms that can affect the psychological development of the subject. Researchers of the resilience second stage research examined the interactions among individuals and groups that resulted in resilience development. Findings from these studies during the second stage revealed that resilience can be developed.

Therefore, the third stage of resilience research focused on policy implications regarding resilience (Luthar *et al.*, 2000). These policy implications include recommendations for parents, teachers, and other members of the community and the ways they can develop resilience or perseverance in youth.

## Grit

Grit is defined as the ability to develop resilience which is critical to the academic success of some individuals, such as many members of underserved and underrepresented groups. Previous research regarding achievement implicates that success is achieved only by those with innate ability (Gottfredson, 1997). According to Eisenberger (1992), perseverance is one's capability to persist in the face of difficulties, risks, and failure. This concept is similar to the aforementioned concept of resilience. Both concepts involve overcoming some type of adversity. Duckworth hypothesizes that when other qualities such as competitiveness, social status, and the need to make money are held constant, grit is a strong predictor of higher achievement (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Duckworth *et al.*, (2007) challenged the notion that talent was the best predictor of high achievement. These researchers suggested that grit is a personal quality shared by most individuals in the upper echelon of their fields. They defined grit as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). To test this hypothesis, Duckworth *et al.*, (2007) created the Grit Scale, a self-report questionnaire designed to measure quantitatively an individual's grit or ability to persist for long-term goal accomplishment. Duckworth *et al.*, (2007) used the Grit Scale to conduct a study that explored if adults with more education possessed more grit than less educated adults. In this study, adults with more education scored higher on the grit scale than adults with less education (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). A later study was conducted to determine if the Grit Scale could predict performance among high achievers. In this study, Duckworth *et al.*, (2007) surveyed 139 undergraduate students at the University of Pennsylvania whose average SAT score was 1,415, a score achieved by less than 4% of students who take the SAT. When SAT scores were held constant, higher grit scores were associated with higher grade point averages (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). Duckworth *et al.*, (2007) also used the Grit Scale to conduct a study involving the freshman cadets of the United States Military Academy, West Point. Admission to the Academy is determined by the Whole Candidate Score, a weighted average of SAT scores, class rank, demonstrated leadership in extracurricular activities, and physical aptitude. Despite the careful

selection process, about one in twenty cadets leave the Academy during the first summer of training. A total of 1,218 freshman cadets completed the Grit Scale questionnaire during the first few days after their arrival to West Point. Duckworth *et al.*, (2007) found that Grit was a better predictor of summer retention than the Whole Candidate Score. Across these studies and others, grit accounted for significant variance in success outcomes.

## **MODES OF INQUIRY**

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the role that grit played in the recruitment, retention, and certification of African American male pre-service teachers and to explore what were the triggers of grit for African American male pre-service teachers. During the quantitative phase of the research, each participant ( $n = 15$ ) enrolled in the Thurgood Marshall College Fund's Teacher Quality Institute (summer, 2013) was given The Grit-S (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) to ascertain "grittiness". The Grit-S has strong psychometric properties with the one year test-retest reliability of  $r = 0.68$  (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). During the qualitative phase of the investigation, follow up investigations were conducted with the students ( $n = 5$ ), with the highest grit scores, to ascertain the answer to the following research question: How, when, and under what condition did you acquire your grittiness?

## **FINDINGS**

The findings of this study will be presented in two steps. First, the results of the self-reported Grit Scale, using descriptive and inferential statistics will be presented. Secondly, the results of the follow-up interviews will be reported.

### **Quantitative Results**

The sample was made up of fifteen African American male pre-service teachers ( $n = 15$ ) enrolled in the Thurgood Marshall College Fund's Teacher Quality Institute during summer 2013. Demographical data collected included participants' academic classification, academic major, age, grade point average (GPA), whether or not they were a first generation college student, and who they lived with for the majority of their life.

Participants' academic classifications (see *Table 1*) ranged from one sophomore (6.7%), two juniors (13.3%), five seniors (33.3%), to seven graduates (46.7%).

**Table 1***Classification Frequency*

Classification	Frequency	Percent
Sophomore	1	6.7
Junior	2	13.3
Senior	5	33.3
Graduate	7	46.7
Total ( $n = 15$ )	15	100.0

Thus, the majority of participants had senior and graduate classifications, which represent 33.3% and 46.7% of the participants, respectively. In addition, participants' academic majors varied (see *Table 2*).

**Table 2***Academic Major Frequency*

Academic Major	Frequency	Percent
English	1	6.7
Elementary Ed.	2	13.3
MA: Elementary Ed.	1	6.7
Social Studies Ed.	1	6.7
Middle Grades Ed. Math & Science	1	6.7
Secondary Ed. Social Sciences	1	6.7
History	1	6.7
English Ed. Secondary	1	6.7
Middle Grades Ed.	1	6.7
Social Science Ed.	1	6.7
4-8 Generalist Interdisciplinary Studies Ed.	1	6.7
Special Ed.	1	6.7
M.Ed.: Instructional Technology	1	6.7
Biology	1	6.7
Total ( $n = 15$ )	15	100.0

The academic majors were: English (6.7%), Elementary Education (20%), Social Studies Education (6.7%), Middle Grades Education (13.3%), Secondary Education (13.3%), History (6.7%), Social Science Education (6.7%), 4-8 Generalist Interdisciplinary Studies Education (6.7%), Special Education (6.7%), Instructional Technology (6.7%), and Biology (6.7%). As seen in *Table 2*, the majority of participants were Elementary and Middle Grades Education, which account for 33.3% of the participants, cumulatively. The mean age of the participants was 25.13 years; the median age was 23.00 years, and the mode was 21 years (See *Table 3*).

**Table 3**

*Age Descriptive Statistics*

Age Descriptive Statistics	
Mean	25.13
Median	23.00
Mode	21 <sup>a</sup>
Std. Deviation	6.243
Variance	38.981
Range	24
Minimum	20
Maximum	44

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

The ages of the participants ranged from 20 years to 44 years; with a range of 24 years and a standard deviation of 6.24 years (See *Table 3*). In terms of frequency distribution of the ages of the participants, majority of the participants (66.7 %) had ages ranging from 20 years to 25 years. The remaining participants (33.3%) had ages ranging from 26 years to 44 years (See *Table 4*).

**Table 4**

*Age Frequency*

Class Interval	Frequency	Percent
20 - 22	6	40.0
23 - 25	4	26.7
26 - 28	2	13.3
29 - 31	2	13.3
44 - 46	1	6.7
Total ( <i>n</i> = 15)	15	100.0

The mean GPA of the participants was 3.22; the median was 3.10, and the mode was 3.00 (See *Table 5*).

**Table 5**

*GPA Descriptive Statistics*

GPA Descriptive Statistics	
Mean	3.2227
Median	3.1000
Mode	3.00 <sup>a</sup>
Std. Deviation	.45850
Variance	.210
Range	1.60
Minimum	2.40
Maximum	4.00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

The GPAs of the participants ranged from 2.40 to 4.00; with a range of 1.60 and a standard deviation of 0.46 (See *Table 5*). A frequency distribution of the GPAs of the participants revealed that majority of the participants (66.7 %) had GPAs ranging from 2.51 to 3.50. Only a minority of the participants (6.7%) had GPAs ranging from 2.00 to 2.50. The remaining participants (26.6%) had the highest GPAs, ranging from 3.50 to 4.00 (See *Table 6*).



**Table 6**

*GPA Frequency*

Class Interval	Frequency	Percent
2.01 - 2.50	1	6.7
2.51 - 3.00	4	26.7
3.01 - 3.50	6	40.0
3.51 - 4.00	4	26.7
Total (n = 15)	15	100.0

A majority of the participants (60%) were not first generation college students. However, 40% of the participants were first generation college students (see *Table 7*).

**Table 7**

*First Generation College Student Frequency*

1st Generation College Student	Frequency	Percent
Yes	6	40.0
No	9	60.0
Total (n = 15)	15	100.0

The results also showed that a majority of the participants (40%) lived most of their life with only their mother. Only 33.3% of the participants lived most of their life with both parents; 13.3 % with grandparents, 6.7% with fathers and 6.7% with others (see *Table 8*).

**Table 8**

*Majority of Life Lived With*

Majority of Life Lived With	Frequency	Percent
Both Parents	5	33.3
Mother Only	6	40.0
Father Only	1	6.7
Grandparents	2	13.3
Other	1	6.7

Majority of Life Lived With	Frequency	Percent
Both Parents	5	33.3
Mother Only	6	40.0
Father Only	1	6.7
Grandparents	2	13.3
Other	1	6.7
Total ( <i>n</i> = 15)	15	100.0

The data suggest that all participants in the Thurgood Marshall College Fund's Teacher Quality Institute (summer, 2013) possessed high grit scores (see *Table 9* and *Table 10*).

**Table 9***Grit Descriptive Statistics*

Grit Descriptive Statistics	
Mean	3.9607
Median	3.8800
Mode	3.88
Std. Deviation	.43508
Variance	.189
Range	1.38
Minimum	3.25
Maximum	4.63

*n* = 15

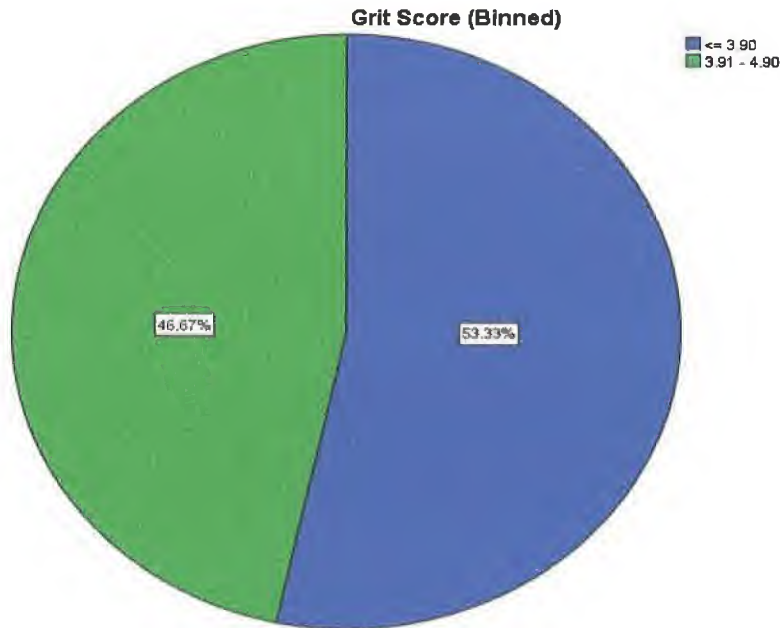
**Table 10***Grit Frequency*

Class Interval	Frequency	Percent
<= 3.90	8	53.3
3.91 - 4.90	7	46.7
Total ( <i>n</i> = 15)	15	100.0

## *The Grit of African American Males*

Using a Likert-type scale of 1 to 5 (one being low (no grittiness) and five being high (quite gritty)), the average grit score for the participants was 3.9607, the mode was 3.88, the range was 1.38, with a minimum of 3.25 and a maximum score of 4.63 (see *Table 9*). Of the 15 participants, 53.3 % had a grit score between 3.25 and 3.90 and 46.7 % had a grit score between 3.91 and 4.90 (see *Table 10* and *Chart 1*).

*Chart 1: Grit Frequency Pie Chart*



An exploration of the relationships between participants' grit scores and the collected demographic variables revealed the subsequent findings. There was a weak to moderate negative relationship ( $r = -0.260$ ) between participants' grit scores and age. Accordingly, the younger participants had higher grit scores. This relationship was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.349$ ) (See *Table 11*).

**Table 11***Pearson Correlation Matrix*

	Grit Score	Age	GPA
Grit Score	1		
Age	-.260 (.349)	1	
GPA	-.251 (.366)	.545* (.035)	1

*n* = 15

Number in parenthesis denotes level of significance

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Also, there was a weak to moderate negative relationship ( $r = -0.252$ ) between participants' grit scores and GPA. Thus, the participants with lower GPAs had a bit higher grit scores. This relationship was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.366$ ) (see Table 11). To further illustrate these relationships, Cross tabulations and bar charts were produced (see Table 12 & 13 and Charts 2 & 3).

To facilitate further explorations with like variables, the grit variable was transformed into a categorical ordinal variable (see Table 10). This allowed for the exploration of the relationships between participants' grit and the subsequent demographical variables. The results were that there was a moderate positive relationship ( $r = 0.351$ ) between participants' grit and classification. Thus, as the higher the classification the higher the grit score -- participants with higher classifications had higher grit scores. This relationship was not statistically significant (see Table 14 and Chart 4). Also, there was a very weak relationship ( $r = 0.054$ ) between participants' grit and whether they were a First Generation College Student or not. Thus, whether participants were a First Generation College Student or not was not related to their grit score. This relationship was not statistically significant (see Table 15 and Chart 5). Finally, there was a moderate relationship ( $r = 0.354$ ) between participants' grit and who they lived with for the majority of their life. This relationship was not statistically significant (see Table 16 and Chart 6).

(Text continues on p. 33)

Table 14

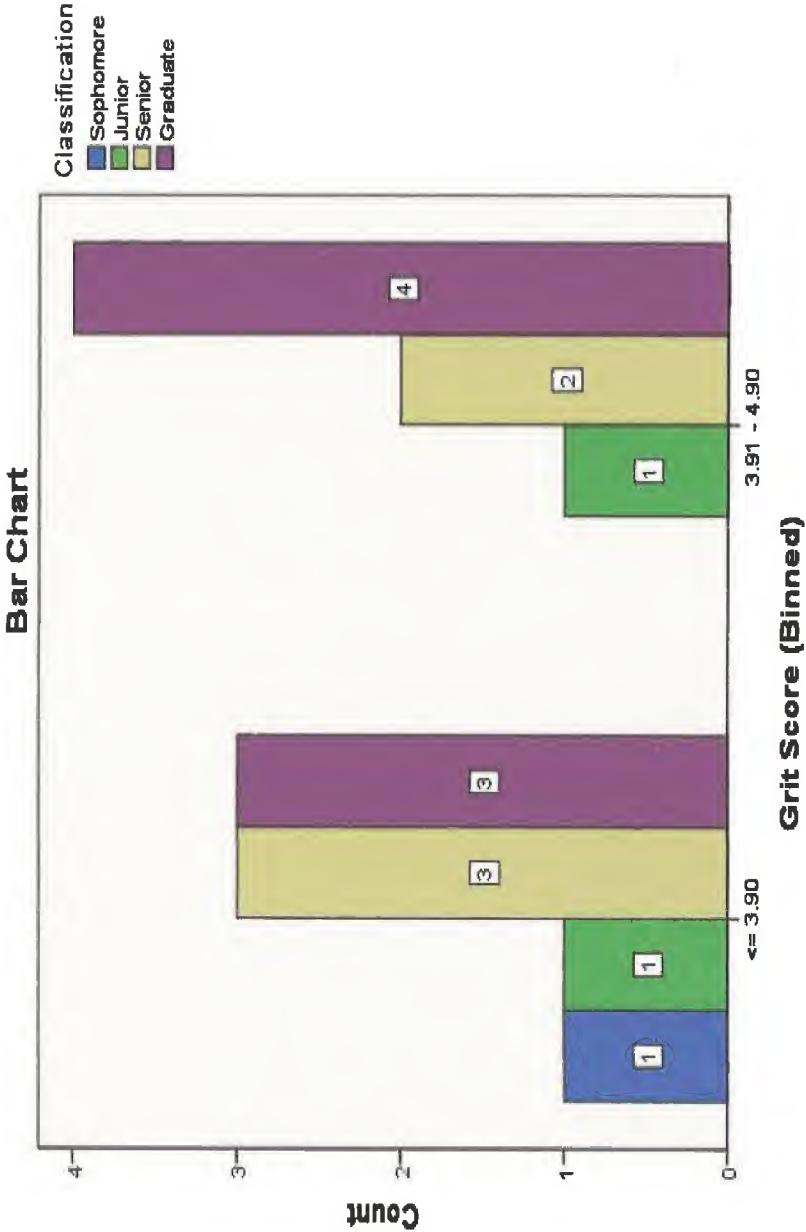
*Grit Score (Binned) \* Classification Crosstabulation*

Classification		Total				
Sophomore		Junior	Senior	Graduate		
Grit Score (Binned)	Count		1	1	3	8
	% within Grit Score (Binned)		12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	100.0%
	% of Total		6.7%	6.7%	20.0%	53.3%
	Count		0	1	2	4
	% within Grit Score (Binned)		.0%	14.3%	28.6%	57.1%
	% of Total		.0%	6.7%	13.3%	26.7%
Total	Count			1	2	5
	% within Grit Score (Binned)			6.7%	13.3%	33.3%
	% of Total			6.7%	13.3%	33.3%

Gamma Coefficient: G = .351 -- Contingency Coefficient: C = .281

Both were not Statistically Significant.

Chart 4: Grit Score (Binned) \* Classification Bar Chart

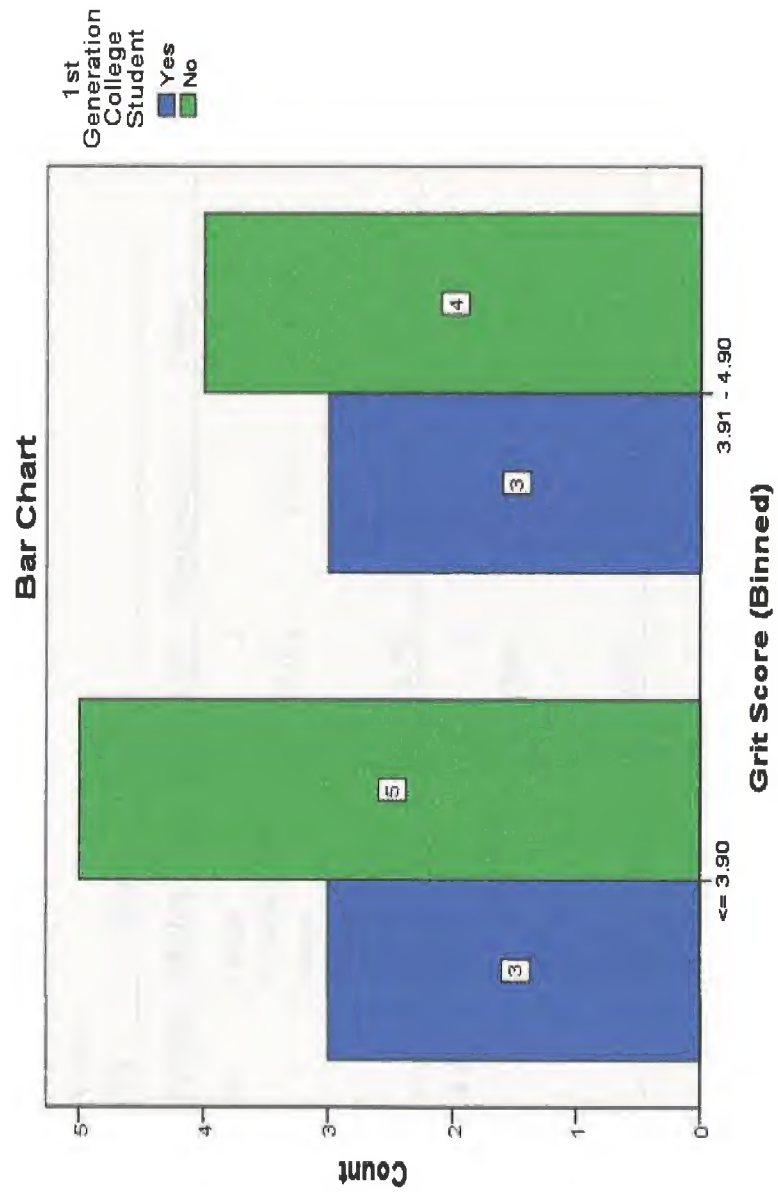


**Table 15***Grit Score (Binned) \* 1st Generation College Student Cross tabulation*

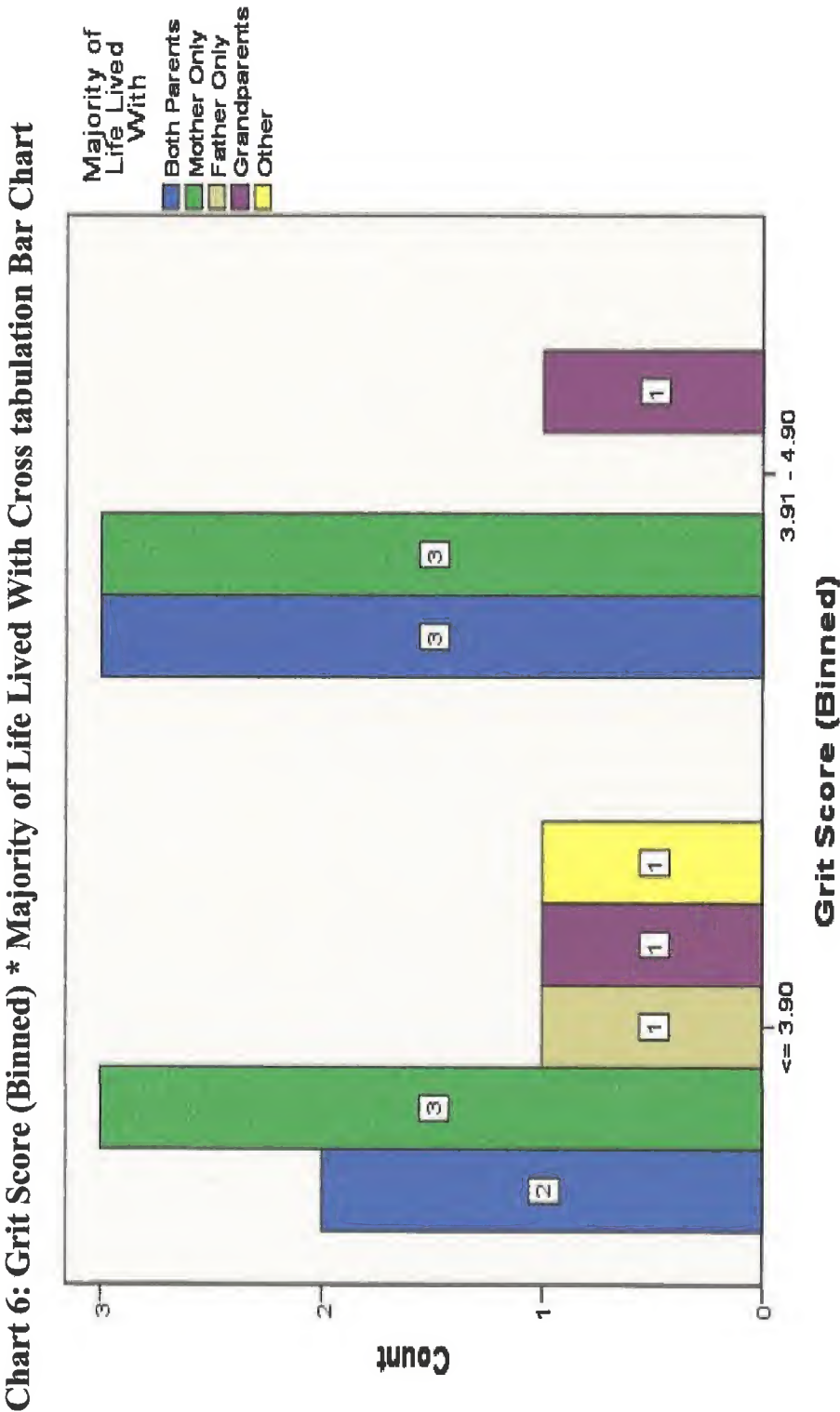
Grit Score (Binned)	1st Generation College Student		Total	
	Yes	No		
<= 3.90	Count	Count	3	5
	% within Grit Score (Binned)	% within Grit Score (Binned)	37.5%	62.5%
	% of Total	% of Total	20.0%	33.3%
3.91 - 4.90	Count	Count	3	4
	% within Grit Score (Binned)	% within Grit Score (Binned)	42.9%	57.1%
	% of Total	% of Total	20.0%	26.7%
Total	Count	Count	6	9
	% within Grit Score (Binned)	% within Grit Score (Binned)	40.0%	60.0%
	% of Total	% of Total	40.0%	60.0%

Contingency Coefficient: C = .054 -- was not statistically Significant.

**Chart 5: Grit Score (Binned) \* 1st Generation College Student Cross tabulation Bar Chart**







## Qualitative Data

Phenomenological research is used to describe the meanings and themes that several individuals lived (Creswell, 2007). Categorically, it should tell a story of lived experiences. In this case study, how, when, and under what conditions did “gritty” African American pre-service teachers acquire grit. Researchers, figuratively and literally, place themselves in the real world of the participants. The researchers interviewed five (5) participants with the highest Grit scores.

Open coding (Creswell, 2007) was used to analyze the interviews. Written field notes were also used to help interpret the data. Themes were identified by each of the researchers and then a consensus discussion session was held to finalize themes and the participants’ quotes to underscore the themes.

During this entire process, every ethical consideration was given to ensure that each participant was treated with respect and dignity. Additionally, trustworthiness of the data was achieved by following Guba’s standards or constructs for qualitative research: Credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Guba, 1981). Through the qualitative portion of the study, three themes emerged that explained the participants’ acquisition of grit. They were: The Role of Family, The Role of Life Circumstances, and The Role of Spirituality.

*The Role of Family.* Without fail, each participant said they learned grit from their family—usually parents, however, sometimes from other family members and sometimes from friends. Whether it was intentionally taught or by mere observation, each participant said they learned to be gritty from their family. Participant One said,

*I learned to be gritty from my parents as they served as role models for me. Their attitudes and their hard work were very important towards completing the goals in their lives.*

He went further to quote his mother, who said,

*You finish what you start. Good or bad, whether it will pay off or not, you will never see the end result of your work if you do not finish,. Trust me son, it will pay off in the long run.*

His father gave similar advice, when he said,

*Put your head to the ground and go forward. Sometimes you have to do the things you don’t want to do in order to do the things you want to do later.*

Participant Three went further to state that his father told him that he had to be resilient.

*You have to be resilient. You must be better than the best. What is the alternative?*

Participant Three said that he also was encouraged to be resilient from his uncles and his cousins, who said

*Because you're small, they told me, "I have to prove myself."*

Participant Four continued the theme of resiliency. He learned this grittiness by "observing his mother and family members".

*My family members were uneducated, but still they worked hard. I watched my family members hustle. It was not illegal things, just survival skills. So I learned to be resourceful. Use my resources to meet goals.*

Participant Five continued this theme of resiliency, when he said

*After my father left my mother, we had to start from nothing. She had to go to college. She had to get a job and work to support three sons. To see her do that and succeed in St. Louis helped me to learn grit.*

Further, Participant Five related that he learned grit from other sources.

*People modeled for me how to be gritty. Learning from others and being a mentor. I even learned from the faults of my classmates and friends. I also learned from their successes too. Learning street smart knowledge and support from people too helped me to become gritty.*

Participant Two was crystal clear in how he learned grit. His father told him

*Never give up on things that are true and dear to you. Education is one of the most important things and will always pay off at the end.*

Before my freshman year in college, my mother told me,

*You just gotta make it happen.*

*The Role of Life Circumstances.* In the words of the modern adage, Life Happens. For these participants, it was no different. These five individuals faced all types of obstacles that they attribute to the acquisition of grit. Participant One stated that he learned grit from watching the life experiences of his father.

*Dad went to the university as an athlete. He was given the opportunity to earn a degree but he did not finish. He wakes up daily at 3 am for work. He returns home at 9 pm only to get back up and do it all over again the next day. I've noticed that my father has done whatever he had to do to support this family*

*and other around him. Therefore, I'm going to take the opportunity to earn my degree so that I won't repeat his mistakes.*

Participant Four's experience was similar to Participant One in that he learned his grit from watching others.

*I had no father in my life. My mother had a boyfriend but I had no strong male role model. As a child, my family experienced financial difficulty, so I decided to try to acquire the things that I need so that I wouldn't repeat my current circumstances.*

The other participants' stories were much more heart-wrenching. Participant Two, for instance, learned his grit in ninth grade when his father died of lung cancer.

*I was a freshman and everything was new to me. I needed guidance and knew I had to persevere. I learned from my mother, not what she said, but by her actions.*

Profoundly, Participant Two recounted a particular episode that was a defining moment for his acquiring grit.

*On a family outing to the beach, all of our family was walking along the beach together, except my mother. She would walk along or many times she would want to be alone. I learned that at times you must be alone to get your work done. That has translated to me today. Sometimes, I just have to be alone.*

Participant Three's life circumstance happened at age thirteen.

*My father died when I was 13 years old. My mother had MS and I had to take care of my three siblings. I had to grow up really fast. I would remember the lessons learned from my father like, "you must be better than the best. What is the alternative?" So today, when things get rough, I persevere.*

Participant Five's story was similar to the others'.

*My little brother committed suicide. That affected the entire family. I had to look at my life and decide if I wanted to live like that. I was not satisfied with my life, I was failing in school. I had a low GPA. I decided that I had to change. I understand that goals in life take lots of steps and building blocks. I had to work hard. And now I am pursuing a MA in curriculum and instruction.*

The five participants related that these life changing events contributed to their acquisition of grit. Where the events may have crippled or at least, stymied the growth and development of many, these

students dealt with these circumstances and actually thrived as a result of them.

*The Role of Spirituality.* The final theme that emerged was the role that spirituality played in the acquisition of grit. Although all participants attributed their faith to their success, two participants were extremely explicit in how spirituality helped them acquire grit. Participant Three said,

*When my father died and my mother had MS, I was angry until I started to go to church more. It was then that this started to make sense.*

He went further to quoted the Bible verses that helped him.

*I remember the verses that helped me the most. 'I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' and 'I can do all things through Christ who Strengthens me.' Before then, I thought I had to prove myself. But when I studied the Word, it helped me through these difficult situations.*

He finally attributed his success to “the Grace of God!”

Participant Five had a similar story when considering the role of spirituality in the acquisition of grit. He said

*My grandmother taught me. She always quoted the Bible. She said things like:*

*God would not give us more than we could bear. Believe and strive to be better; and, if you want it, you can do it. The teachings of the Bible were important to me. It was through these teachings that I was able to make it through my little brother's suicide.*

## **DISCUSSION OR SIGNIFICANCE**

The data identified by participants offer a step that contributes to much needed information on the grit of African American male pre-service teachers. The data found are unique because the grit of African American male teachers has rarely been examined. Therefore, the purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the role that grit played in the recruitment, retention, and certification of African American male pre-service teachers. During the quantitative phase of the research, each participant (n =15) enrolled in the Thurgood Marshall College Fund's Teacher Quality Institute (summer, 2013) was given The Grit-S (Duckwork & Quinn, 2009) to ascertain “grittiness.” The data from the surveys revealed that a relationship exist between grit and age, GPA, classification, and who they lived with for the majority of their life.

During the qualitative phase of the investigation, follow up interviews were conducted with five students ( $n = 5$ ), with the highest grit score, to ascertain the answer to the following research question:

*How, when, and under what condition did you acquire your grittiness?*

The qualitative portion of the examination was undertaken to ascertain if grit could be taught and if so under what conditions. Five participants, with the highest grit scores, were interviewed and three themes emerged: The role of the family, the role of life circumstances, and the role of spirituality. All students possessed high grit scores (see Table 1 and Table 2). Grit is defined as the ability to develop resilience, which is critical to the academic success of some individuals. Duckworth *et al.* (2007) define grit as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (p. 1087). According to Eisenberger (1992), perseverance is one’s capability to persist in the face of difficulties, risks, and failure. As found by Duckworth *et al.* (2007), when other qualities such as competitiveness, social status, and the need to make money are held constant, grit is a strong predictor of higher achievement (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, one can surmise that this group of African American pre-service males will be successful.

The work is symmetric to the work of Masten, *et al.* (1990), Benard (1991), Garmezy (1991), Linquanti (1992), and Yates, Pelphrey, and Smith (2008) identified these factors (protective factors) that contribute to student success. They are the influence of family, influence of personal circumstances, and influence of spirituality.

Although this inquiry had a small sample, the results are extremely profound. This investigation uncovered that grit can be taught, and as asserted by Duckworth that grit is a better predictor than academic ability, then the way we “do business” in education must be “turned on its head”. Rather than teaching academic skills, we should teach students how to be gritty.

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